Nomen: Classwork Daily Life 6: Religion

Spatium:

Instructions: complete the reading and answer the accompanying questions.

(The reading is modified from Mr. Donn, historyforkids.net, and Odyssey online)

|  |
| --- |
| Mythology, Roman Gods, and the Rise of Christianity  **Background**: Roman mythology is a collection of traditional stories, beliefs and rituals that Romans used to describe the origin of Roman civilization, culture, history and religion. Romans believed these stories to be true despite many supernatural events described in them. The religious part of Roman mythology is heavily inspired from Greek mythology.  The early Romans particularly liked Greek gods and adopted most of them. However, in an effort to make them look Roman, they changed their names and the stories. Roman mythology also loaned many concepts and stories from Etruscan religion which is not very well documented by historians. The earliest period of Rome is a blend of history and mythology. Characters like Romulus are considered legendary and there is no definitive evidence of their actual existence.   1. Write a definition for Roman mythology based on the first sentence of the reading. 2. Did the Romans believe in the gods and myths? 3. Which two mythologies/religions heavily influenced Roman mythology?   **Religion and Roman Mythology**: Roman mythology plays a very important role in religion. As the Roman religion was based on rituals, myths were very important to the followers of the Roman religion. Romans believed in ‘specialist gods’ who all had a different specialty and affected the lives of Romans in different ways. Roman mythology explained the background, history and powers of all these gods. |

**Roman Gods:** For many hundreds of years, the Romans worshipped thousands of gods. Trees, rocks, streams, bridges, everything in ancient Rome had a guardian spirit or god watching over it. Each god had at least one job to do. Some gods had very important jobs like watching over the crops, or bringing the sun out each day. But all gods were important. The Romans prayed to their gods at least once every day. As Rome expanded and grew, the Romans came in contact with people who worshiped other gods.  If those people had fought extremely well, the Romans figured that their gods must be pretty good, so the Romans adopted those gods and made them Roman gods as well.  They gave those gods Roman names and changed some of the personalities of these gods to better fit the Roman way of life. However, when gods were added to the Roman list of gods, it was the law that all people in the Roman world must worship Roman gods.

1. What sort of jobs did the gods have?
2. How often did the Romans pray to the gods?
3. What is one example of why the Romans would decide to adopt gods from another group?

The Roman’s most important gods and goddesses were based on the Greeks and changed to be more Roman. Jupiter was considered king of gods and god of thunder and lightning. He was also patron god of Rome and was the Roman version of Greek god Zeus. Jupiter’s wife, Juno was considered the protector of Rome and came from Greek goddess Hera. Mars was god of war, Mercury was god of trade, Neptune was god of sea and patron of horses, Venus was goddess of love and beauty and Diana was goddess of hunt, animals and archery. Romans worshipped all these gods for varying reasons described in the mythology. Ancient Roman religion was almost entirely based on mythology. Romans welcomed foreign gods as well and adopted them for worship to gain universal favor from all divine sources.

1. List the important Roman gods:
2. Why did the Romans welcome and adopt foreign gods?

**Religion Practices**

People worshipped the gods in special buildings called temples. Inside the temple was a statue of a god. Priests looked after the temple. People went there to make sacrifices or offerings of food, flowers or money. Sometimes the priest killed an animal, such as a bull, as part of the sacrifice ceremony. Some Emperors said they were gods too, so everyone had to make a sacrifice to the Emperor.

Romans also had gods at home. They believed in household spirits that protected the family. They had miniature temples, or shrines, in their homes. The family would make offerings of food and drink to the household gods, and pray for good luck and protection.

Every house had a shrine, called a lararium, where the family worshipped daily. The gods and spirits who protected the home and family were known as the Penates and Lares. The Penates and Lares were honored at the shrine, along with the family ancestors (a lar is an ancestor's spirit.) These ceremonies usually involved pouring libations (liquids such as milk, oil, or wine) on a sacrificial fire placed on the altar.

1. What were the names of the buildings in which Romans worshipped?
2. What was inside this building?
3. What did Romans do inside the building?
4. What did the Romans sometimes think of the emperor?
5. What did the Romans call the household shrine?
6. What were the names of the household gods?
7. What did Romans do at their homes to honor the gods?

**Christianity** began in the Roman Empire around the 1st century AD. Christians refused to worship Roman gods, and that was against the law. Christians knew that was against the law, so they met in secret. If discovered, they were arrested and treated as criminals. Many were killed. In spite of the risks, many people converted to Christianity. This new religion's followers grew rapidly. There were two major reasons for this. First, Christians promised that if you lived your life right you went to heaven when you died.  In the other Roman religions, only the gods could live in heaven; everyone else was consigned to the underworld. Second, every Christian considered themselves equal to every other Christian.  There was no nobility or higher caste.  This sounded awfully good to the people who lived in the poor sections of Rome, in many cases good enough to take the risk.

Things changed for Christians in 313 CE, when Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity and made Christianity legal.  Under his leadership, Christians could no longer be arrested just for being Christian.  After a fairly short period of time, Christianity became the dominant religion of Rome.  After that, it became the law that you must be Christian to be a citizen of Rome.

1. When Christianity began in Rome, why were Christians persecuted (punished)?
2. In what two ways did Christianity differ from Roman mythology?
3. What change did Emperor Constantine make for Christianity in the Roman empire?

Reflection: In what ways did religion in ancient Rome differ from the US today? (list at least two ways)